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STUMP DIRT

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U. S. Department of Agriculture





STUMPDIRT

Stumpdirt is as "old as the hills," yet many people have never heard of it. However, I have worked in it nearly all my life. Mother used it for her flowers and I began to gather it for her with a toy wheelbarrow when just a child.

Many happy hours were spent in the farm woods at this work, and it was while getting Stumpdirt that I learned my first lessons in Nature. Chipmunks, squirrels, and birds became my friends, but when a ruffed grouse got up from behind a stump where I was filling my wheelbarrow I ran all the way home scared almost to death by the thunderous noise of its getaway. Lying on my back resting, I saw my first mistletoe way up in the top of a gum tree. I can still remember the thrill of finding a blue gentian and it remains to this day one of my favorite flowers.

Experience With Fertilizers

As I grew up I became associated with father in the fertilizer business on the farm and all but forgot Stumpdirt. Father pioneered in fertilizers. Starting with the sale of marl to neighbors, he soon began grinding oyster shells for lime with a small outfit powered by a treadmill and the farm team. This was followed by a much more pretentious bone mill run by water power, and later, by steam. As chemical fertilizers came into use, he built a much larger factory devoted to "mixed goods" as he always called them.

I helped with the actual mixing of fertilizers, but spent the most of my time on the farm. Denied a college agricultural education because of poor health, I gained much first-hand information the hard way. Lessons learned from test plots conducted for father in those early days seem all the more worthwhile as time goes on.

Some neighbors called us "Presbyterian" farmers (a local term for putting up a good front) and I guess it was deserved, for the front of the farm got much more than its share of fertilizers. It was good advertising though, as the bumper crops we raised helped no little to sell our product.

Old Love

When the fertilizer business outgrew the farm, father built a larger plant in an adjoining town and I stayed on the farm. With more time, I went back to my early love—native plants—but the



success that I enjoyed with the farm crops seemed to forsake me entirely with my hobby. The feeling I shared with father that chemical fertilizers would help all growing things worked adversely with the plants brought from the woods. The Hollies that I loved best of all grew sickly and yellow, so I doubled the fertilizers, and all but killed them.

After several years of almost complete failure, certain plants began to show promise. Those planted around our ice house, where tons of old sawdust had been thrown, thrived, as did some that were planted in a newly cleared plot (Virgin Soil). Going to our woods, with a large wheelbarrow, (a score of years after I used the toy one), I again brought in Stumpdirt. The use of Stumpdirt brought success so quickly and completely that I have always hesitated to tell my story for fear of ridicule, but here are the facts:

Differs from Oak Leafmold

Stumpdirt is rotted wood from stumps and fallen logs, and looks much like Oak Leafmold, but differs considerably. Stumpdirt is the better soil sponge; holds more water longer. Oak Leafmold, unlike most fertilizers that have to be applied annually, feeds plants for several years, but Stumpdirt "wears" so long that it is in a class by itself as a plant food.

Rhododendrons placed around my mother's house eleven years ago were planted in about a foot of Stumpdirt put on top of subsoil from the bottom of the cellar. No fertilizers were used and no plantfood has been added since planting, yet the rhododendrons made more growth last year than during any previous year.

Fifteen years have passed since I planted a Hemlock Hedge at the side of my house. Each year visitors admire it and ask for the fertilizer formula used. Few believe me when I inform them that no fertilizer has been applied and that Stumpdirt put in the trench at planting time still furnishes the plant food. To further emphasize the long life of Stumpdirt, I have placed dozens of Hollies and other plants in tubs filled with Stumpdirt and they have grown for years without additional plantfood.

Most interesting is the proof furnished by nature herself that Stumpdirt is a complete plantfood. Quite often one can find in the woods rhododendrons with their entire root system inside a fallen birch log. Such plants three or four feet high are from five to ten years old. I have tried several times to bring such a specimen home, but the bark always parts before I can accomplish it.



Billions of Rootlets

Nature has much to teach us, but we learn so little because most of us are apt to just take things for granted. For instance, a few hours' time spent in walking through almost any woods will reveal small trees, ferns and flowers growing to perfection in old stumps. How much more interesting these plants become when we realize that almost all have grown from acorn or seed with nothing for plantfood but Stumpdirt. If we go further and take an old stump apart we will be simply amazed at the root system of these plants. Right here we would learn perhaps the most wonderful thing about Stumpdirt. It is fascinating indeed to see the countless tiny rootlets plants send out when they grow in these old stumps. And when we realize that it is only through these little rootlets that growing things take in plantfood, we can more readily comprehend the miracle of Stumpdirt.

Nature Gives New Idea

One day some years ago my men dug up a hemlock that had grown in an old stump. It was perhaps fifteen years old. When we got the tree out of the ground (and out of the stump which still had enough hard wood on the outside, above ground, to keep its shape), I found that almost all of the thousands of fine rootlets were within the stump while only larger roots extended into the soil. The fact that the little rootlets elected to stay in the Stumpdirt rather than grow out into the soil gave me an idea, which, carried out in my Holly fields, has changed cultural methods entirely and saved many dollars.

Rather than the very costly old method of root pruning or moving large nursery-grown Hollies every two or three years—absolutely impossible now under war time conditions—I place them in “wells” filled with Stumpdirt. Spaced far apart, my trees—like the hemlock in the old stump—grow for years with most of their valuable little rootlets confined while a few larger roots seek space in the original soil outside of the “well.” The trees dig and ball perfectly.

Now let me urge that you try a few simple tests at home that will do more to convince than all I have written. Dig two small trees or plants and reset, putting one in Stumpdirt and the other in your best garden soil. Water well and take the same care of each. Lift again, after a year, and the root system will be so much heavier on the “Stumpdirt” plant that you will find it hard to believe your own eyes. Just such a test with



house plants (many prefer a mixture of Stumpdirt and soil on a 50-50 basis rather than 100% Stumpdirt in pots), has convinced hundreds that these plants too like Stumpdirt.

Nature's Own Formula

I could go on telling you further facts about the long life of Stumpdirt as a plantfood or the amazing way it makes roots grow, but the space will not permit. This may be as well, for sooner or later someone is going to ask the "why" of it all and I will have to confess that I am "stumped." Stumpdirt is nature's own plantfood and I guess she is the only one who can tell the whole story as she alone knows the formula. I suspect, however, that she has incorporated in Stumpdirt various helpful plant bacteria as well as several of the little known, but vitally necessary elements that we do not list as standard fertilizer ingredients.

The native plants which the most of us love best because they are "scarce" and hard to grow around the home show the greatest response to Stumpdirt. These plants want and will only grow right when planted with virgin plant food around their roots. Stumpdirt is the original plantfood. It was used by nature herself ages before the first of our fertilizers were made and marketed. It is really a soil conditioner and not sold as a fertilizer, yet it will do more than all the fertilizers man has made.

Plants Cannot Read Analysis Tag

One thing that many of us overlook is the fact that plants cannot read the analysis tag on a bag of fertilizer and our native plants at least would not give a nickel if they could. The accepted idea that all we have to do to make plants grow is to use so many units of Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potash and that chemical fertilizers are cheapest and best because they often furnish these units at less cost is definitely out. Few chemicals help the physical condition of the soil and many, if used in large quantities, actually affect adversely and the soil becomes hard and unproductive.

Farmers in the East, where chemical fertilizers have been used for years, often express the wish that they could have "new" soil again. The best that can be done in most cases is to plow under heavy cover crops to get wood and fibre in the ground again. Our native plants, flowers, and trees bring this problem to us in a greatly exaggerated form. Many of them simply will not thrive when chemical fertilizers are used, but



happily the problem solves itself when they are planted in Stumpdirt.

I believe a little thought will persuade most of us that it really makes sense to use the same plantfood on native plants when we transplant them to our gardens that nature used to grow them with. And the use of Stumpdirt is very timely. American in every sense of the word, it is truly a home product that can, in many cases, be gathered on the very estate where it is to be used. We can be patriotic and practical at the same time, for no fertilizer brought in from a foreign country will make our native plants grow like Stumpdirt.

Ease of Application

The thing I like most about Stumpdirt is the ease of application. Strangely enough, this works adversely with many users. It simply is **too** easy to use. There is no analysis tag, no rule or table to remember and no limiting factors of any kind except cost. "Apply generously around the roots of plants"—are the only instructions. I have worked with Stumpdirt for over 25 years and to my knowledge it has never hurt a single plant. Somewhat acid, it would seem that it should be recommended for acid loving plants only, and as I have previously indicated, it is ecological to use it on native plants. But Stumpdirt must "have something" for it really helps lime loving plants and old established garden plant life as well as plants from our woods.

In closing let me bring to mind the fact that plants do not eat, but drink their plant food. Water so common that we do not appreciate it, will, if used without stint, save fertilizer dollars whether one uses chemical fertilizers or Stumpdirt.

Now Available To Trade

"Stumpdirt," now available to the trade, is made up of about 40% rotted wood, ages old, from stumps and fallen logs, 40% Oak Leafmold and 20% old sawdust, mostly Oak. Nothing is taken away nor anything added. It is slightly acid. This material is composted a year or more before being put on sale.

EARLE DILATUSH

ROBBINSVILLE, N. J.



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[1948]



STUMPDIRT--

I am Nature's own plant food.

Plants like me best of all.

I keep their roots warm in winter,
cool in summer,

I hold water like sponge,
and feed plants for years.

I am older than any man-made
fertilizer. = Better, too.

I have no bad faults.

You can use me anywhere.

Nature Made Me . . .

Plants Love Me



EARLE DILATUSH'S REAL FARM MARKET

ROUTE 25 — — ROBBINSVILLE, NEW JERSEY

